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# THE WORLD CONFLICT IN ITS RELATION TO AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

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## I

The way in which President Wilson directed America's entrance into the war has had a mighty effect on the public opinion of the world. Many of those who are disappointed or pleased say they are surprised. They would not be surprised had they made it their business this last year to understand the policy of their government.

In May, 1916, the President made a speech which will be counted among the two or three decisive utterances of American foreign policy. The Sussex pledge had just been extracted from the German government, and on the surface American neutrality seemed assured. The speech was an announcement that American isolation was ended, and that we were prepared to join a League of Peace. This was the foundation of all that followed, and it was intended to make clear to the world that America would not abandon its traditional policy for imperialistic adventure, that if America had to fight it would fight for the peace and order of the world. It was a great portent in human history, but it was overshadowed at the time by the opening of the presidential campaign.

Through the summer the President insisted again and again that the time had come when America must assume its share of responsibility for a better organization of mankind. In the early autumn very startling news came from Germany. It was most confusing because it promised peace maneuvers, hinted at a separate arrangement with the Russian court party, and at the resumption of unlimited submarine warfare. The months from November to February were to tell the story. Never was the situation more perplexing. The prestige of the Allies was at low ebb, there was treachery in Russia, and, as Mr. Lansing said, America was on the verge of war. We were not only on the verge of war, but on the verge of a bewildering war which would not command the whole-hearted support of the American people.

With the election past, and a continuity of administration assured, it became President Wilson's task to make some bold move which would clarify the muddle. While he was preparing this move, the German chancellor made his high-handed proposal for a blind conference. That it would be rejected was obvious. That the rejection would be followed by the submarine war was certain. The danger was that America would be drawn into the war at the moment when Germany appeared to be offering the peace for which the bulk of American people hoped. We know now that the peace Germany was prepared to make last December was the peace of a conqueror. But at the time Germany could pose as a nation which had been denied a chance to end the war. It was necessary, therefore, to test the sincerity of Germany by asking publicly for a statement of terms. The President's circular note to the powers was issued. This note stated more precisely than ever before that America was ready to help guarantee the peace, and at the same time it gave all the belligerents a chance to show that they were fighting for terms which could be justified to American opinion. The note was very much misunderstood at first because the President had said that, since both sides claimed to be fighting for the same things, neither could well refuse to define the terms. The misunderstanding soon passed away when the replies came. Germany brushed the President aside, and showed that she wanted a peace by intrigue. The Allies produced a document which contained a number of formulae so cleverly worded that they might be stretched to cover the wildest demands of the extremists or contracted to a moderate and just settlement. Above all the Allies assented to the League of Peace which Germany had dismissed as irrelevant.

The war was certain to go on with America drawn in. On January 22, after submarine warfare had been decided upon but before it had been proclaimed, the President made his address to the Senate. It was an international program for democracy. It was also a last appeal to German liberals to avert a catastrophe. They did not avert it, and on February 1 Germany attacked the whole neutral world. That America would not submit was assured. The question that remained to be decided was the extent of our participation in the war. Should it be merely defensive on the high seas, or should it be a separate war? The real source of confusion was the treacherous and despotic Russian government. By no twist of

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language could a partnership with that government be made consistent with the principles laid down by the President in his address to the Senate.

The Russian Revolution ended that perplexity and we could enter the war with a clear conscience and a whole heart. When Russia became a Republic and the American Republic became an enemy, the German empire was isolated before mankind as the final refuge of autocracy. The principle of its life is destructive of the peace of the world. How destructive that principle is, the ever-widening circle of the war has disclosed.

## II

Our task is to define that danger so that our immense sacrifices shall serve to end it. I cannot do that for myself without turning to the origins of the war in order to trace the logical steps by which the pursuit of a German victory has enlisted the enmity of the world.

We read statements by Germans that there was a conspiracy against their national development, that they found themselves encircled by enemies, that Russia, using Serbia as an instrument, was trying to destroy Austria, and that the Entente had already detached Italy. Supposing that all this were true, it would remain an extraordinary thing that the Entente had succeeded in encircling Germany. Had that empire been a good neighbor in Europe, by what miracle could the old hostility between England and France and Russia have been wiped out so quickly? But there is positive evidence that no such conspiracy existed.

Germany's place in the sun is Asia Minor. By the Anglo-German agreement of June, 1914, recently published, a satisfactory arrangement had been reached about the economic exploitation of the Turkish empire. Professor Rohrbach has acknowledged that Germany was given concessions "which exceeded all expectations," and on December 2, 1914, when the war was five months old, von Bethmann-Hollweg declared in the Reichstag that "this understanding was to lessen every possible political friction." The place in the sun had been secured by negotiation.

But the road to that place lay through Austria-Hungary and the Balkans. It was this highway which Germany determined to control absolutely; and the chief obstacle on that highway was Serbia backed by Russia. Into the complexities of that Balkan

intrigue I am not competent to enter. We need, however, do no more than follow Lord Grey in the belief that Austria had a genuine grievance against Serbia, a far greater one certainly than the United States has ever had against Mexico. But Britain had no stake in the Austro-Serbian quarrel itself.

It had an interest in the method which the central powers took of settling the quarrel. When Germany declared that Europe could not be consulted, that Austria must be allowed to crush Serbia without reference to the concert of Europe, Germany proclaimed herself an enemy of international order. She preferred a war which involved all of Europe to any admission of the fact that a coöperative Europe existed. It was an assertion of unlimited national sovereignty which Europe could not tolerate.

This brought Russia and France into the field. Instantly Germany acted on the same doctrine of unlimited national sovereignty by striking at France through Belgium. Had Belgium been merely a small neutral nation the crime would still have been one of the worst in the history of the modern world. The fact that Belgium was an internationalized state has made the invasion the master tragedy of the war. For Belgium represented what progress the world had made towards coöperation. If it could not survive then no internationalism was possible. That is why through these years of horror upon horror, the Belgian horror is the fiercest of all. The burning, the shooting, the starving, and the robbing of small and inoffensive nations is tragic enough. But the German crime in Belgium is greater than the sum of Belgium's misery. It is a crime against the bases of faith at which the world must build or perish.

The invasion of Belgium instantly brought the five British democracies into the war. I think this is the accurate way to state the fact. Had the war remained a Balkan war with France engaged merely because of her treaty with Russia, had the fighting been confined to the Franco-German frontier, the British empire might have come into the war to save the balance of power and to fulfill the naval agreements with France but the conflict would probably never have become a people's war in all the free nations of the empire. Whatever justice there may have been in Austria's original quarrel with Serbia and Russia was overwhelmed by the exhibition of national lawlessness in Belgium.

This led to the third great phase of the war, the phase which

concerned America most immediately. The Allies directed by Great Britain employed sea power to the utmost. They barred every road to Germany, and undoubtedly violated many commercial rights of neutrals. What America would do about this became of decisive importance. If it chose to uphold the rights it claimed, it would aid Germany and cripple the Allies. If it refused to do more than negotiate with the Allies, it had, whatever the technicalities of the case might be, thrown its great weight against Germany. It had earned the enmity of the German government, an enmity which broke out into intrigue and conspiracy on American soil. Somewhere in the winter of 1915, America was forced to choose between a policy which helped Germany and one which helped the Allies. We were confronted with a situation in which we had to choose between opening a road to Germany and making an enemy of Germany. With the proclamation of submarine warfare in 1915 we were told that either we must aid Germany by crippling sea power or be treated as a hostile nation. The German policy was very simple: British mastery of the seas must be broken. It could be broken by an American attack from the rear or by the German submarine. If America refused to attack from the rear, America was to be counted as an enemy. It was a case of he who is not for me is against me.

To such an alternative there was but one answer for a free people to make. To become the ally of the conqueror of Belgium against France and the British democracies was utterly out of the question. Our choice was made and the supreme question of American policy became: how far will Germany carry the war against us and how hard shall we strike back? That we were aligned on the side of Germany's enemies no candid man, I think, can deny. The effect of this alignment was to make sea power absolute. For mastery of the seas is no longer the possession of any one nation. The supremacy of the British navy in this war rests on international consent, on the consent of her allies and of the neutrals. Without that consent the blockade of Germany could not exist, and the decision of America not to resist allied sea power was the final blow which cut off Germany from the world. It happened gradually, without spectacular announcement, but history, I think, will call it one of the decisive events of the war.

The effect was to deny Germany access to the resources of the neutral world, and to open these resources to the Allies. Poetic

justice never devised a more perfect retribution. The nation which had struck down a neutral to gain a military advantage found the neutral world a partner of its enemies.

That partnership between the neutral world and Germany's enemies rested on merchant shipping. This suggested a new theory of warfare to the German government. It decided that since every ship afloat fed the resources of its enemies, it might be a good idea to sink every ship afloat. It decided that since all the highways of the world were the communications of the Allies, those communications should be cut. It decided that if enough ships were destroyed, it didn't matter what ships or whose ships, England and France would have to surrender and make a peace on the basis of Germany's victories in Europe.

Therefore, on the 31st of January, 1917, Germany abolished neutrality in the world. The policy which began by denying that a quarrel in the Balkans could be referred to Europe, went on to destroy the internationalized state of Belgium, culminated in indiscriminate attack upon the merchant shipping of all nations. The doctrine of exclusive nationalism had moved through these three dramatic phases until those who held it were at war with mankind.

## III

The terrible logic of Germany's policy had a stupendous result. By striking at the bases of all international order, Germany convinced even the most isolated of neutrals that order must be preserved by common effort. By denying that a society of nations exists, a society of nations has been forced into existence. The very thing Germany challenged Germany has established. Before 1914 only a handful of visionaries dared to hope for some kind of federation. The orthodox view was that each nation had a destiny of its own, spheres of influence of its own, and that it was somehow beneath the dignity of a great state to discuss its so-called vital interests with other governments. It was a world almost without common aspiration, with few effective common ideals. Europe was split into shifting alliances, democracies and autocracies jumbled together. America lay apart with a budding imperialism of its own. China was marked as the helpless victim of exploitation. That old political system was one in which the German view was by no means alto-

gether disreputable. Internationalism was half-hearted and generally regarded somewhat cynically.

What Germany did was to demonstrate *ad nauseam* the doctrine of competitive nationalism. Other nations had applied it here and there cautiously and timidly. No other nation in our time had ever applied it with absolute logic, with absolute preparation, and with absolute disregard of the consequences. Other nations had dallied with it, compromised about it, muddled along with it. But Germany followed through, and Germany taught the world just where the doctrine leads.

Out of the necessities of defense men against it have gradually formulated the ideals of a coöperative nationalism. From all parts of the world there has been a movement of ideals working slowly towards one end, towards a higher degree of spiritual unanimity than has ever been known before. China and India have been stirred out of their dependence. The American Republic has abandoned its isolation. Russia has become something like a Republic. The British empire is moving towards closer federation. The Grand Alliance called into existence by the German aggression is now something more than a military coalition. Common ideals are working through it—ideals of local autonomy and joint action. Men are crying that they must be free and that they must be united. They have learned that they cannot be free unless they coöperate, that they cannot coöperate unless they are free.

I do not wish to underestimate the forces of reaction in our country or in the other nations of the Alliance. There are politicians and commercial groups who see in this whole thing nothing but opportunity to secure concessions, manipulate tariffs and extend the bureaucracies. We shall know how to deal with them. Forces have been let loose which they can no longer control, and out of this immense horror ideas have arisen to possess men's souls. There are times when a prudent statesman must build on a contracted view of human nature. But there are times when new sources of energy are tapped, when the impossible becomes possible, when events outrun our calculations. This may be such a time. The Alliance to which we belong has suddenly grown hot with the new democracy of Russia and the new internationalism of America. It has had an access of spiritual force which opens a new prospect in the policies of the world. We can dare to hope for things which we never dared

to hope for in the past. In fact if those forces are not to grow cold and frittered they must be turned to a great end and offered a great hope.

## IV

That great end and that great hope is nothing less than the Federation of the World. I know it sounds a little old-fashioned to use that phrase because we have abused it so long in empty rhetoric. But no other idea is big enough to describe the Alliance. It is no longer an offensive-defensive military agreement among diplomats. That is how it started to be sure. But it has grown, and is growing, into a union of peoples determined to end forever that intriguing, adventurous nationalism which has torn the world for three centuries. Good democrats have always believed that the common interests of men were greater than their special interests, that ruling classes can be enemies, but that the nations must be partners. Well, this war is being fought by nations. It is the nations who were called to arms, and it is the force of nations that is now stirring the world to its foundations.

The war is dissolving into a stupendous revolution. A few months ago we still argued about the Bagdad corridor, strategic frontiers, colonies. Those were the stakes of the diplomat's war. The whole perspective is changed today by the revolution in Russia and the intervention of America. The scale of values is transformed, for the democracies are unloosed. Those democracies have nothing to gain and everything to lose by the old competitive nationalism, the old apparatus of diplomacy, with its criminal rivalries in the backward places of the earth. The democracies, if they are to be safe, must coöperate. For the old rivalries mean friction and armament and a distortion of all the hopes of free government. They mean that nations are organized to exploit each other and to exploit themselves. That is the life of what we call autocracy. It establishes its power at home by pointing to enemies abroad. It fights its enemies abroad by dragooning the population at home.

That is why practically the whole world is at war with the greatest of the autocracies. That is why the whole world is turning so passionately towards democracy as the only principle on which peace can be secured. Many have feared, I know, that the war against Prussian militarism would result the other way, that instead of

liberalizing Prussia the outcome would be a prussianization of the democracies. That would be the outcome if Prusso-Germany won. That would be the result of a German victory. And that is why we who are the most peaceful of democracies are at war. The success of the submarine would give Germany victory. It was and is her one great chance. To have stood aside when Germany made this terrible bid for victory would have been to betray the hope of free government and international union.

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There are two ways now in which peace can be made. The first is by political revolution in Germany and Austria-Hungary. It is not for us to define the nature of that revolution. We cannot dictate liberty to the German people. It is for them to decide what political institutions they will adopt, but if peace is to come through revolution we shall know that it has come when new voices are heard in Germany, new policies are proclaimed, when there is good evidence that there has, indeed, been a new orientation. If that is done the war can be ended by negotiation.

The other path to peace is by the definite defeat of every item in the program of aggression. This will mean, at a minimum, a demonstration on the field that the German army is not invincible; a renunciation by Germany of all the territory she has conquered; a special compensation to Belgium; and an acknowledgment of the fallacy of exclusive nationalism by an application for membership in the League of Nations.

Frontier questions, colonial questions, are now entirely secondary, and beyond this minimum program the United States has no direct interest in the territorial settlement. The objects for which we are at war will be attained if we can defeat absolutely the foreign policy of the present German government. For a ruling caste which has been humiliated abroad has lost its glamor at home. So we are at war to defeat the German government in the outer world, to destroy its prestige, to deny its conquests, and to throw it back at last into the arms of the German people marked and discredited as the author of their miseries. It is for them to make the final settlement with it.

If it is our privilege to exert the power which turns the scale, it is our duty to see that the end justifies the means. We can win

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nothing from this war unless it culminates in a union of liberal peoples pledged to coöperate in the settlement of all outstanding questions, sworn to turn against the aggressor, determined to erect a larger and more modern system of international law upon a federation of the world. That is what we are fighting for, at this moment, on the ocean, in the shipyard and in the factory, later perhaps in France and Belgium, ultimately at the council of peace.

If we are strong enough and wise enough to win this victory, to reject all the poison of hatred abroad and intolerance at home, we shall have made a nation to which free men will turn with love and gratitude. For ourselves we shall stand committed as never before to the realization of democracy in America. We who have gone to war to insure democracy in the world will have raised an aspiration here that will not end with the overthrow of the Prussian autocracy. We shall turn with fresh interests to our own tyrannies—to our Colorado mines, our autocratic steel industries, our sweatshops and our slums. We shall call that man un-American and no patriot who prates of liberty in Europe and resists it at home. A force is loose in America as well. Our own reactionaries will not assuage it with their Billy Sundays or control through lawyers and politicians of the Old Guard.

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